

# Utah Health Status Update:

## Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, Utah 2003: Violence and Unintentional Injury

March 2004

Utah Department of Health

In order to monitor health-risk behaviors among secondary school students, Utah participates in the biannual Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS) sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This report summarizes the results of the 2003 survey concerning violence and injury and trends in related behaviors over the period 1991-2003. The survey was completed by 1,451 students in 91 Utah public schools, grades 9-12, in the spring of 2003.

### Behaviors That Contribute to Violence

During a period of increasing media attention to youth violence, the YRBS survey results indicate that certain key behaviors that contribute to youth violence actually declined among Utah secondary school students from 1991 to 2003 (Figure 1). From 1991 to 2003, the percentage of students carrying a weapon declined from 24% to 15%, the percentage who were in a physical fight declined from 42% to 29%, and from 1993 to 2003, the percentage who reported carrying a gun declined from 11% to less than 5%. Similar, though more modest, declines were found in these behaviors over the same period nationwide. Some portion of Utah's decline may be related to a change from passive to active survey consent in 1999 that caused removal of some of Utah's most at-risk students from the sampling pool.

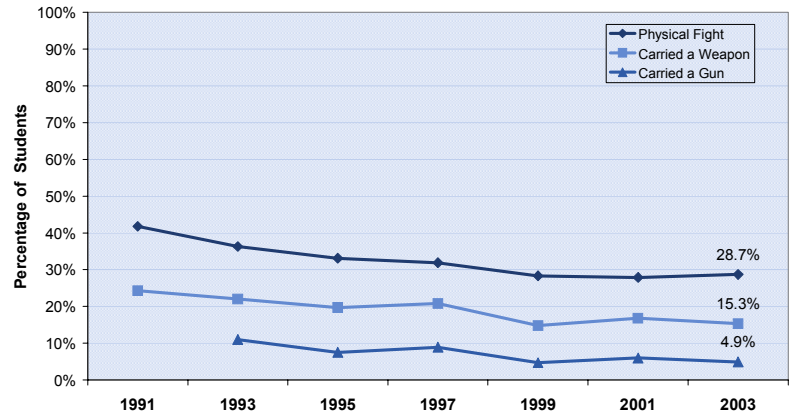
### Behaviors That Contribute to Injury

Figure 2 shows national and Utah YRBS survey results for bicycle helmet and seat belt use, two behaviors closely related to the risk for unintentional injury. Of students who had ridden a bicycle, 78.3% had rarely or never worn a bicycle helmet. The percent of students who rarely or never wore a bicycle helmet declined significantly in Utah and the United States over the period.

In the 2003 survey only a small percentage of Utah students (5.6%) reported they never or rarely wore a seat belt when riding in a car driven by someone else. This percentage had declined dramatically since 1991, when the rate was over 25%. Utah showed greater gains

### Behaviors That Contribute to Violence

Figure 1. Percentage of students who reported behaviors that contribute to violence, Utah Secondary School Survey, 1991-2003.



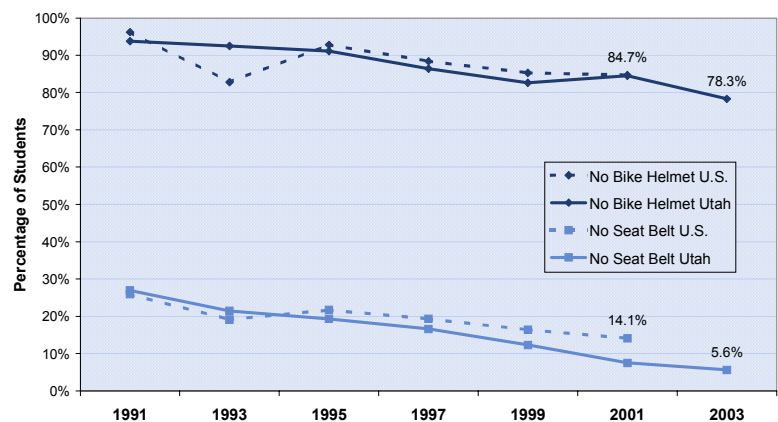
"Physical Fight" is defined as the percentage of students who were in a physical fight one or more times during the last 12 months.

"Carried a Weapon" is defined as the percentage of students who carried a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on one or more of the past 30 days.

"Carried a Gun" is defined as the percentage of students who carried a gun on one or more of the past 30 days.

### Behaviors That Contribute to Injury

Figure 2. Percentage of students who reported behaviors that contribute to injury, U.S. and Utah Secondary School Surveys, 1991-2001 and 2003.



"No Bike Helmet" is defined as the percentage of students who rode a bicycle during the past 12 months who never or rarely wore a bicycle helmet.

"No Seat Belt" is defined as the percentage of students who never or rarely wore a seat belt when riding in a car driven by someone else.

over the period than the nation as a whole. The 2001 national YRBS survey found that 14.1% of students never or rarely wore a seat belt while others were driving, almost twice the level found in Utah at that time. In Utah, male students were significantly more likely (7.0%) than female students (4.0%) to have never or rarely worn seat belts as passengers in 2003.

### Sadness and Suicide Ideation and Attempts

During the twelve months preceding the 2003 survey, 31.9% of female students and 21.6% of male students had felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities (Figure 3). Fewer respondents (18.0% of females and 12.4% of males) reported making a suicide plan, with actual suicide attempts made by 8.8% of females and 6.2% of males. Unlike the majority of health-risk behaviors that contribute to violence and injury reported in the YRBS survey, female students are more likely than male students to engage in suicide ideation and to actually attempt suicide. The percentage of students experiencing prolonged sadness and actually attempting suicide in Utah did not decline over the period 1999-2003 when these items were assessed in the YRBS survey.

### Forced Sexual Intercourse

Nationwide, 7.7% of students in 1991 had ever been forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to. Figure 4 shows that 8.5% of students in the 2003 Utah YRBS survey reported ever being forced to have sexual intercourse. Females were significantly more likely to report forced sexual intercourse (10.9%), though 5.7% of male students also reported that they had ever been forced to have sexual intercourse.

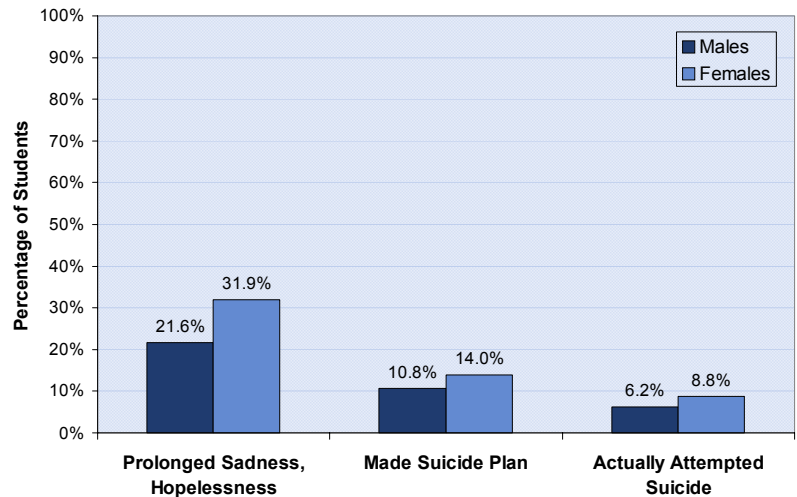
### Conclusions

In Utah, three fourths of all deaths among persons 15-19 years of age result from only four causes: motor vehicle crashes, other injuries, homicide, and suicide. Results of the 2003 YRBS indicate that numerous secondary school students engage in behaviors that increase their likelihood of death from one of these causes. While trends for some health-risk behaviors appear to be declining, many students continue to be at risk for injury. Public health activities to monitor and prevent behaviors that contribute to violence and injury continue to be important.

Note: YRBS data apply only to youth who attend mainstream schools and are not representative of students in alternative or private schools. As with all surveys, some error results from non-response and over- or under-reporting of behaviors. Rigorous survey design and administration minimizes error from those sources.

### Suicide Related Behavior

Figure 3. Percentage of students who reported suicide related behavior, Utah Secondary School Survey, 2003.



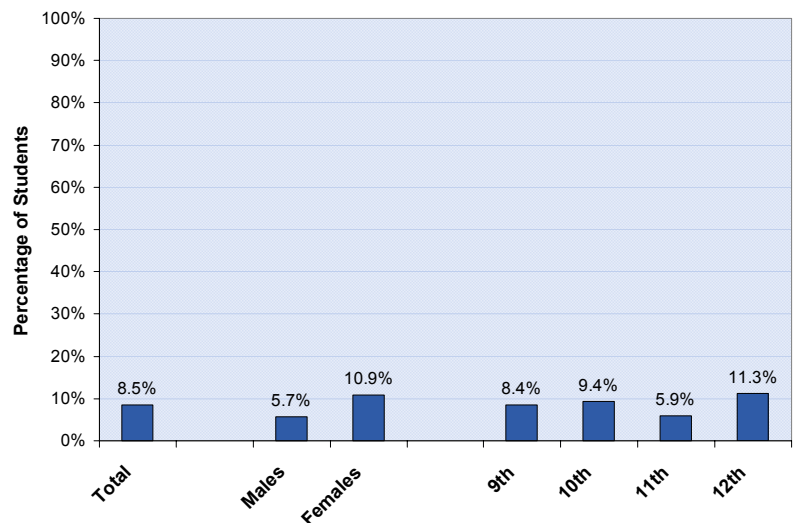
"Prolonged Sadness, Hopelessness" is defined as the percentage of students who, during the past 12 months, ever felt so sad or hopeless every day for two weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities.

"Made Suicide Plan" is defined as the percentage of students who made a plan about how they would attempt suicide during the past 12 months.

"Actually Attempted Suicide" is defined as the percentage of students who actually attempted suicide one or more times during the past 12 months.

### Forced Sexual Intercourse

Figure 4. Percentage of students who have been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to, Utah Secondary School Survey, 2003.



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For additional information about this topic and the YRBS contact the Violence and Injury Prevention Program, Utah Department of Health, P. O. Box 142106, Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-2106, (801) 538-6864, FAX (801) 538-9134, email: [vipp@utah.gov](mailto:vipp@utah.gov); or by contacting the Office of Public Health Assessment, Utah Department of Health, P.O. Box 142101, Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-2101, (801) 538-6108, FAX (801) 538-9346, email: [phdata@utah.gov](mailto:phdata@utah.gov).